

The disciple's question was "Lord teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples"

Teach us to pray

How do we pray? Do we use written prayers written by others and recite them?

Do we repeat phrases words over and over and over again, maybe hoping to be lifted to somewhere anywhere or to be heard because of it? Maybe if we repeat the same thing over and over again it will get through. Like a squeaky wheel or an annoying neighbour who just won't give up pestering us to give him something in the middle of the night!!

Maybe it would be better if we pray eloquently and grandly when others are watching, using fancy phrasing and long words, impressive rhyming and rhythm,
Or better still set phrases and tones and stanzas will help.

Or maybe it needs to be thought through again!

Lord teach us to pray

A great request is it not? How do we pray, Why do we pray, to whom are we praying and for what benefit? Is it just a way to organize our thoughts, our ideas hopes and plans, is it a way of meditating to be calmer and more thoughtful to be a more 'centered' type of person? Or do fear like Shakespeare's character Claudius in Hamlet

CLAUDIUS

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.

Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

Lord teach us to pray!

The answer the example, the model Jesus then outlines and goes on to reinforce, is not just a repetition, or a set of words a short prayer which we often use in prayer, with good cause, but a model and teaching that goes deeper and wider than just the words and thoughts. It contains the teaching the underpinning and assumptions of the character of God the character of the one coming to God and the reasons for the confidence and assurance of being heard by God of the one coming in prayer.

Jesus assumes, based on the request, that his disciple's then and now will pray! It is not an optional extra something for the super spiritual or the mature in faith, but for all who come to God to do, to pray!

Is pray simply a ritual a part of a Christian ordering of the day, you have set times and set things to do and to say and then get on with the rest of your life.

There are as many questions about pray and its efficacy its effectiveness and arguments one way or another that would take to much time this morning to cover.

Instead let us concentrate on what is related in the section of Luke's gospel.

It begins Lord teach us to pray!

He (that is Jesus) said to them, when you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
And lead us not into temptation.

Father...

We pray to whom? In Matthew's gospel it says Our heavenly Father, here it is Father, a direct address a direct approach, a personal and corporate address. Father

To whom do we address our prayers?

To our Father! Not some nameless force, not some all encompassing unnameable essence or idea not an ephemeral thought and breath, not to the unapproachable, uncomprehensible, being located so far out of our sphere of understanding as to be totally absent, not to some regent in a far off distant land beyond the cosmos, but a named personal Father, the Father, our Father.

Yes the bible describes God as all-knowing, as creator of all that is, encompassing the vast reaches of the universe and beyond who spoke and the stars came into being. Yet here in this place when the disciples of Jesus are asking to be taught how to pray, how to communicate with God, Jesus begins by saying to them the one who you approach, the one who you are going to talk to to pray to is your Father!

To the Greek mind this was potentially mind blowing, to a Roman it would have been difficult to comprehend. Addressing God as Father?

As personally interested and involved and approachable, that you could address him without all the other requirements, a simple open and bold approach!

To put it another way we pray because of relationship. God is our Father, we then are His children, we pray because we are in relationship to Him.

The whole basis of our prayers indeed the whole basis of our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ is relationship. Our relationship with Jesus and above that even our relationship with the Father, or more accurately His relationship with us. For it is He who initiated it to start with.

It is on that basis of relationship and specifically the Father child relationship that we pray.

Once we get that as our starting point everything else begins to come into perspective. Our prayers begin to change, God is not the genie in the bottle who can be summoned to do our will. He is our Father. He is not some capricious deity to be appeased by ritual and sacrifice, who will if he is in the mood grant our requests, deign to stoop to our level to occasionally give us tidbits to keep us going, He is our Father.

We are His children, adopted into the family through Jesus Christ, called and specially chosen to be part of the team, part of the family.

Father, Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

Out of the relationship of Father and child the request or more rightly the declaration is that the Father's name be hallowed, his kingdom come.

That as members of the family we are not to bring into disrepute that family name. We are not to bring shame to the family, or dishonour to our Father in our actions words or deeds. Which is the negative side of this declaration.

More rightly we are to seek to honour our Father's name to honour our family's name. Hallowed be your name, honoured be your name, holy be your name! All declarations we don't use much these days. But the sentiment, the idea or practice is still in use even today.

Take the game of rugby in New Zealand for instance. For an aspiring player to get to wear the Black jersey to step into the tradition the place of an All Black is to step almost into hallowed territory. The name (and I don't mean the corporate branding) the name of the All Blacks is highly treasured to many in this country.

We have been chosen and adopted, called into a family of much greater standing of deeper history and tradition, of stronger and longer lasting mana than even the All Blacks, we are part of the family of God.

How much more so should our Father's name his mana, his reputation be treasured, guarded and revered?

Not to garner special favour but out of the abiding and deep love that God has for us, and that we come to have for Him.

His kingdom come, and to add what we read in Matthew, His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

It is a request a declaration a longing that the kingdom of God the will of God be done, in our lives individually and corporately, that full reconciliation be realised between people and God and between us, you and I.

That we would love God with all that we have, that we would love our neighbour as ourselves. Coupled with that, the call to go and make disciple's of all nations, as we have been taught so teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has taught.

Give us our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins,
For we also forgive everyone who sins against us.
Lead us not into temptation.

The requests that are outlined are basics, daily provision of needs, the ongoing forgiveness, for our sins, and it is a brave or foolish one who says they have no sin.

But note especially it is linked with our forgiving everyone, not just some, but everyone who sins against us.

Which can be an ongoing and lengthy process in some cases.

Lead us not into temptation, or as in some versions do not bring us to the time of trial. All of these sections these parts of the prayer are seen in a relational light.

Asked within the security of a family relationship.

Why do I suggest that?

Jesus goes right on into two parables of persistence, of boldness, of comparison each one calling on the experience and picture of relationships.

That of neighbour and host,

With the saying in the middle of ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened.

That of Father and child, in the rhetorical parable, of comparison.

If we as fallen people as fallen fathers know and long to give good things to our children, long to

provide, protect, and raise our children to maturity, how much more so do we imagine God our heavenly Father longs for the same and will provide for the same for His children?

This is a very important part and concept to understand, for it colours then our understanding and our prayers to God. If we view Him as capricious, as cruel, as judgemental and aloof, how then can we pray?

If on the other hand we see him as he has revealed himself to be, that of Father, loving, caring, merciful, approachable, longing to gather us together, longing to have our friendship, our love. If we see God as our Father, desiring the best for us and the rest of His family then does this not also colour our prayers our ability indeed our desire to come to Him in prayer. To pray without ceasing, bringing our petitions to him with thanksgiving.

If we still find it hard going, wondering if indeed this can be so, we can ask and are instructed to ask for the Holy Spirit, who will enable us to cry out Abba Father, who when we run out of words, or find words too hard to form will intercede on our behalf.

How then are we to pray? Lord teach us to Pray!